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Contact: Darren Rogers
Senior Director, Communications & Media Services
Churchill Downs Racetrack
(502) 636-4461 (office)
(502) 345-1030 (mobile)
Darren.Rogers@KyDerby.com

HAY DAKOTA RALLIES TO SPRING COMMONWEALTH TURF SURPRISE

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Saturday, Nov. 12, 2016) – Alice Metler's Chicago invader **Hay Dakota** charged home down the center of Churchill Downs' Matt Winn Turf Course under jockey **Denny Velazquez** to upset 3-1 favorite **Bondurant** by a neck in Saturday's 13th running of the \$100,000 Commonwealth Turf (Grade III) for 3-year-olds. **Scholar Athlete**, who led most of the way until the final yards, was another half-length back in third.

Sent to post at odds of 29-1 in the field of 11 in the 1 1/16-mile turf race, Hay Dakota was third-to-last at the top of the stretch but swung wide to deliver his late kick and outran Bondurant at the finish to stop the clock in 1:43.60 over firm going.

Hay Dakota registered his first graded stakes win and gave Velazquez, who began riding in 2010, and 26-year trainer **Joel Berndt** their first graded stakes wins.

"This was one of my things to accomplish," Berndt said. "I've won some training titles and won some stakes races, but I thought, 'What's next on my to-do list in my career?' and of course it was to win a graded stakes race and to do it here at Churchill Downs is very special for me. I'm numb, kind of."

The victory was worth \$58,280 and increased Hay Dakota's earnings to \$137,090 with a record of 4-1-3 in 11 starts.

Maryland shipper Scholar Athlete, ridden by **Angel Cruz**, nearly won in gate-to-wire fashion after setting the pace through fractions of :24.04, :48.88, 1:14.17 and 1:37.76.

"Coming to the stretch I had horse and I asked him and he responded," Cruz said. "He just got outrun by a couple of horses that had more than me."

As Scholar Athlete dictated the pace, Bondurant raced in the clear on the outside near the back of the pack with Hay Dakota just to his inside. Both horses commenced their moves on the far turn, but it was the extremely wide Hay Dakota who prevailed at the wire.

"I was pretty confident in the horse," Velazquez said of Hay Dakota. "He's a pretty good horse. I was just planning on waiting to move a little bit earlier than I did so I kind of waited around and I had a lot of horse underneath me and I thought that it was a great ride."

"He ran great – he ran unbelievable," said Bondurant's trainer **Ian Wilkes**. "He was a little wide. I was telling (jockey) Brian (Hernandez Jr.) that I don't think this horse has figured out his own style yet. He hasn't quite understood what he wants to do. In some races he'll drop way back, but today he was more on the muscle so Brian couldn't save ground. He couldn't tuck him in because he was just on (other horses') heels too much. He ran great. He's finishing – he's finishing off strong and we're proud of him."

Hay Dakota returned \$60.20, \$23.40 and \$11.60 as the second-longest priced horse in the field. Bondurant paid \$5.20 and \$3.80. Scholar Athlete paid \$3.60 to show.

It was another neck back to **Zapperini**, who was followed in order by **Sir Dudley Digges**, **Ikerrin Road (IRE)**, **One Mean Man**, **Blackout (FR)**, **Discreetness**, **Tizzarunner** and **Surgical Strike**.

Prior to the Commonwealth Turf, Hay Dakota won a \$21,400 allowance/optional claiming event at 1 1/16 miles on turf over his home track at Hawthorne Race Course on Oct. 19. In late August, he finished third and was only beaten a neck by One Mean Man in the \$200,000 Mystic Lake Derby at Canterbury Park, which encouraged Berndt to try the Commonwealth Turf after a recent Hawthorne allowance race didn't fill.

"I thought he had a shot, gauging off of **One Mean Man** and he was beating older horses up at Canterbury Park and Hawthorne," Berndt said. "We were so far back that day in the Mystic Lake Derby and it was all speed that was winning that day. Maybe just one more jump would've helped us out."

"I've never won a race at Churchill Downs let alone a graded stakes race so to be able to say that I accomplished that is pretty awesome."

Hay Dakota, a gelded son of Haynesfield out of the Harlan's Holiday mare Church by the Sea, was bred in Kentucky by the Commonwealth's former **Governor Brereton C. Jones**.

Racing at Churchill Downs resumes Sunday with a 10-race program that begins at 1 p.m. ET.

COMMONWEALTH TURF QUOTES

JOEL BERNDT, trainer of HAY DAKOTA (winner): “This was one of my things to accomplish. I’ve won some training titles and won some stakes races, but I thought, ‘What’s next on my to-do list in my career?’ and of course it was to win a graded stakes race and to do it here at Churchill Downs is very special for me. I’m numb, kind of.

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DENNY VELAZQUEZ, jockey of HAY DAKOTA (winner): “This is very exciting to win a graded stakes race. I feel good, man.

“I was pretty confident in the horse. He’s a pretty good horse. I was just planning on waiting to move a little bit earlier than I did so I kind of waited around and I had a lot of horse underneath me and I thought that it was a great ride.”

IAN WILKES, trainer of BONDURANT (runner-up) – “He ran great – he ran unbelievable. He was a little wide. I was telling Brian (jockey Brian Hernandez Jr.) that I don’t think this horse has figured out his own style yet. He hasn’t quite understood what he wants to do. In some races he’ll drop way back, but today he was more on the muscle so Brian couldn’t save ground. He couldn’t tuck him in because he was just on (other horses’) heels too much. He ran great. He’s finishing – he’s finishing off strong and we’re proud of him.”

BRIAN HERNANDEZ JR., jockey on BONDURANT (runner-up) – “Our horse ran a good race. It was his first time in a stake and he stepped-up and ran a big race. We have to be proud of him.”

Q: Did you have any trouble during the race? “No, the only thing is we were a little wide, but it was either be wide or be stuck behind a bunch of horses that weren’t going to take us anywhere. So I took the overland route just to give him a clean trip.”

ANGEL CRUZ, jockey on SCHOLAR ATHLETE (third) – “He settled really good on the backstretch. Coming to the stretch I had horse and I asked him and he responded. He just got outrun by a couple of horses that had more than me.”

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